

XXXVI.—*Notes on Alphéraky's 'Geese of Europe and Asia.'*

By T. SALVADORI, H.M.B.O.U.

WHEN I was working at the twenty-seventh volume of the 'Catalogue of Birds in the British Museum' I was fully aware that the material at my disposal was not sufficient to settle several questions, especially as regards the species of Geese, and I entertained the hope that Russian ornithologists might procure the requisite materials more easily than those of other countries, inasmuch as many of the species of *Anser* are at home in Siberia and in the more northern latitudes of the Russian Empire. It was, then, with great expectations that I heard of Mr. Alphéraky's project of bringing out a 'Monograph of the Geese of Europe and Asia.' My expectation has not been disappointed, and I have found Alphéraky's book a good piece of work, on which, however, I wish to offer a few remarks.

As it is most important to know the geographical distribution of the Geese—where they breed and whither they migrate,—a map, in which the areas of the different species are clearly shown, would have been a great improvement to the work. The lack of this feature is much to be regretted. Another weak point of Alphéraky's essay is the want of conciseness and the very frequent repetitions, which, instead of producing clearness often lead to the opposite result.

The genera *Chen* and *Philacte* do not call for remarks, as does the genus *Anser*. This has been split in two, viz. *Anser* of Brisson and *Melanonyx* of Buturlin: the former genus being distinguished by the light nail of the bill and by the feet entirely light-coloured, and by the abdomen having black patches in the adult birds; while the second (*Melanonyx*) has a black nail on the bill and shews no black patches on the abdomen. These characters do not appear to me to be of generic value.

In the genus *Anser* are included the Grey Lag Goose (*Anser anser* = *A. ferus*), the White-fronted Goose (*A. albifrons*), and the Lesser White-fronted Goose (*A. finmarchicus*).

As to the first species, Mr. Alphéraky unites together the Western (*A. anser*) and the Eastern form (*A. rubrirostris* Hodgs.), for he finds that there is no difference between them. I do not know whether Mr. Alphéraky has drawn his conclusions from the comparison of such a number of specimens as I had before me in the British Museum, but at the time I thought that the 24 specimens of the Eastern Grey Lag Goose examined by me were sufficiently larger in size and more spotted with black patches on the abdomen to enable me to recognise them as a distinct form. No doubt the differences are small, and it may be a matter of opinion to accept or not the Eastern or Asiatic form as specifically or subspecifically different. Mr. Alphéraky, speaking of another species, says “that there is a general increase of [size in] bills in Geese as we proceed eastwards.” I believe that the Grey Lag Goose follows this rule, and that the Eastern bird ought to be—and, I believe, is—somewhat different from the Western form.

Among the distinctive characters of the Eastern Grey Lag Goose has been mentioned the bright red base of the upper mandible. This information, which appeared also in the ‘Catalogue of Birds’ (p. 92), I derived from Radde, but Mr. Alphéraky points out that it has arisen from a mistake of Taczanowski and others, who have misunderstood a passage of Radde (Sib. Reis. ii. p. 358), where he mentions a rusty-brown colour, not on the base of the bill itself, but on the feathers round the base of the upper mandible, which, as a narrow band, passes into fiery foxy red.

The White-fronted Goose (*A. albifrons*) calls for only one remark, viz. that Mr. Alphéraky lumps with it *A. gambeli*, which the American ornithologists, and I following them, generally regard as a larger form of *A. albifrons*.

The smaller White-fronted Goose only requires to be mentioned on account of the name “*Anser finmarchicus* Gunner” used by Alphéraky in preference to “*Anser erythropus* Linn.” I still think that we must not give up Linnæus’s name (*cf.* Newton, P. Z. S. 1860, pp. 339–341). To the synonymy of this species is now added *Anser rhodo-*

*rhynchus* Buturlin, Psov. i Ruzh. Okh. 1901 (Dikie Gusi Ros. i., Febr.-Apr.); id. sep. impr. p. 19; id. Sin tabl. Okhotn. Pt. Ross. i. 1901, p. 46; id. Psov. i Ruzh. Okh. 1902, June, p. 120.

In the genus or subgenus *Melanonyx* the following species are included:—*M. neglectus*, *M. brachyrhynchus*, *M. arvensis*, *M. arvensis sibiricus*, *M. segetum*, *M. carneirostris*, *M. segetum serrirostris*, and *M. mentalis*.

For convenience' sake I must begin my remarks with the Bean-Goose, which in the 'Catalogue of Birds' stands as *Anser fabalis* (Lath.), but which Mr. Alphéraky prefers to call *A. segetum* (Gm.). The author splits this species into two—namely, *A. arvensis* Brehm and *A. segetum*; the first being distinguished by a larger yellow bill, while the latter has a shorter black bill with a yellow band round it, between the black nail and the nostrils. These differences were clearly pointed out long ago by Naumann (Vög. Deutschl. xi. pp. 277, 300, tt. 286, 287; Naumannia, 1853, pp. 5-8, Taf. i. ff. A, B, C, D, E, F), and it may be that they have not been duly appreciated. Apparently Mr. Alphéraky has noticed another very important character in the bill, which "if looked at from above shows the apparent length of the nail in adult birds of *M. segetum* contained in the total culmen-length not more than  $3\frac{1}{2}$  times, while in *M. arvensis* the same nail is contained in the culmen in adults up to  $4\frac{1}{2}$  times." This character really appears to me of great importance, although unfortunately I have not been able to test it, as all the Bean-Geese from Italy in our collection belong to the true *A. segetum*, and none to *A. arvensis*. The question of the distinction of the two birds must be carefully investigated, as there are a few points not quite clear, especially as regards geographical distribution. It appears that the breeding-area of *A. arvensis* is more extended both westwards and eastwards than that of *A. segetum*, and in two localities (Kolguev Island and Novaya Zemlia) both these species have been found breeding. From Mr. Alphéraky's remarks it appears that "in Holland, Belgium, France, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Turkey, and Greece *M. segetum* is

certainly met with, but everywhere in scant numbers as compared with *M. arvensis*." But in Italy, from what I know, it is quite the reverse. I have been assured that *A. arvensis* has also been found in Italy, but in any case it is very rare compared with *A. segetum*, which is extremely abundant in winter. This difference in the number of specimens of the two forms in Italy and elsewhere goes to shew that they are really specifically distinct.

While these remarks were being written I received from my friend Count Arrigoni degli Oddi two Geese killed near Venice. These have the yellow part of the bill more or less extended on the sides towards the base, and both have a narrow line of white feathers round the base of the bill, so that apparently both belong to *Anser arvensis*; but the length of the bill is respectively 63 and 57 mm., and therefore does not reach the average length attributed to *A. arvensis*, but comes within the limits of the bill of *A. segetum*. Besides, the nail of the bill is not so short and broad as it is described in the former species, and it is contained only four times in the total length of the bill, so that in this respect the bills of the two birds are intermediate between the bill dimensions of those attributed by Mr. Alphéraky to *A. segetum* and that of *A. arvensis*. I am still very puzzled about the two birds being specifically different.

Another Goose very imperfectly known, if really distinct from the common Bean-Goose, is the one from Novaya Zemlia which has been named *Anser (Melanonyx) carneirostris* Buturlin, Dikie Gusi Ross. Imp. (Psov. i Ruzh. Okh. 1901). This bird differs from the ordinary Bean-Goose in having the light band round the bill dark flesh-colour, instead of yellow-orange, while the legs and feet are of the same yellow as in *M. segetum*. A similar bird has been killed in Holland and is mentioned by Mr. Alphéraky, who is not inclined to accept the specific value of *M. carneirostris* and expresses his opinion that the peculiar colour of the bill of *M. segetum* may depend on age, dimorphism, or individual variation.

I come now to *Anser serrirostris* Gould. I must notice, first,

that, speaking of this bird in the 'Catalogue,' I made the remark (p. 103) that it was "quite possible that under *A. serrirostris* I had included two distinct form—some larger, with the culmen 3·15 inches long and with the head and neck buffish brown (*A. middendorffi*), and the other smaller, much more like *A. fabalis* (= *segetum*), but larger and with the bill much thicker (*A. serrirostris*)." Of the six specimens mentioned in the 'Catalogue,' the first [*a.* ♀ ad. Tunka, Amoor-land, May (*G. Radde*, Seebohm Coll.)] is the one which I thought could be attributed to *A. middendorffi*, while the last [*f.* Ad. Yokohama (*H. Pryer*, Seebohm Collection)] has become the type of *Anser mentalis* Oates, Man. Game-Birds of India, ii. p. 77 (1899). Mr. Alphéraky, after having discussed the characters given by Oates and having examined two more similar specimens, has arrived at the conclusion that *Anser mentalis* is not specifically different from *A. serrirostris*\*. Therefore we have only to discuss *A. serrirostris* and the bird which I have supposed to belong to *A. middendorffi*. As to *A. serrirostris* there is no difficulty in recognising it, for although very similar to *A. fabalis* (= *segetum*) it is much larger and is especially remarkable for its large beak and feet.

As regards *A. middendorffi*, in the 'Catalogue of Birds' I have given as distinctive characters: the size, larger than that of *A. serrirostris*, the culmen attaining the length of even 3·15 inches, and the head and neck buffish brown. Such was the bird from Tunka in the British Museum, absolutely similar to the bird from Boganida figured by Middendorff, *Reise Sibir.* ii. 2, Taf. xx. f. 1 (head). Also the figure of the head of *Anser arvensis sibiricus* (Alphéraky, op. cit. pl. 23) agrees in every respect with Middendorff's figure and the bird in the British Museum mentioned above. Mr. Alphéraky recognises Middendorff's Goose as a distinct species, but he thinks that the name *Anser middendorffi* cannot stand. According to him, Severtzow, under the name of *A. middendorffi*, has included also specimens of *A. arvensis* and has

\* I accept for the present this conclusion, although with some hesitation.

made other mistakes, and, therefore, Mr. Alphéraky has discarded Severtzow’s name and has given to Middendorff’s Goose the new name of *Melanonyx arvensis sibiricus*. From this proceeding I utterly dissent. In the first place, the bill of Middendorff’s Goose is coloured exactly like that of the Bean-Goose and not like that of the Yellow-billed Bean-Goose, and therefore Middendorff’s Goose evidently is not a form of *Anser arvensis*, but of *A. segetum*. Besides, Severtzow meant to give the name *Anser middendorffi* to the bird which Middendorff figured in plate xx. f. 1 (head) of the ‘*Reise in Sibiriens*’ under the name of *Anser grandis* Midd. (nec Gmel.), and this bird is the same as the one to which Mr. Alphéraky has given the name of *Melanonyx arvensis sibiricus*, which, therefore, is a synonym of *Anser middendorffi*.

There are only two other species of the *Melanonyx*-group to speak of, and these are *Anser brachyrhynchus* and *A. neglectus*. The latter has been described since the publication of the ‘*Catalogue of Birds.*’ Both species are nearly allied and they are peculiar in having the light band round the bill and the feet of a light pink; apparently the pink colouring of the bill in *A. brachyrhynchus* is more extended on the sides than in *A. neglectus*. In the plumage there is one important difference duly noticed by Mr. Alphéraky, viz. the former has the wing-coverts ashy grey, while the latter has the same coverts blackish brown as in *A. segetum*. This is a very good distinguishing character between the two allied species. There are other differences of importance: *A. neglectus* is of a larger size and has the bill longer and more robust, but I doubt whether it will be always easy to distinguish *A. neglectus* from *A. segetum*, when skins have dried and thereby lost the distinctive coloration of the light band of the bill. According to Alphéraky, the bill of Sushkin’s Goose is comparatively weak and narrow, less high at the base, and has the nail smaller and narrower. As regards colouring, Mr. Alphéraky declares that he has been “unable to find any distinctive differences.”

The two allied birds differ also in their geographical

distribution: *A. brachyrhynchus* is a more western bird, extending from Spitsbergen and probably also from Franz-Joseph Land to North-western Europe, wintering in large numbers in Great Britain. *Anser neglectus*, so far as we know at present, extends from Novaya Zemlia and probably also from Kolguev Island, through the Ufa Government in Russia, to Hungary, Persia, and most probably also to India, from which country it appears to have been recorded under the name of *A. brachyrhynchus*. It is not unlikely that *A. neglectus* breeds also to the eastward of Novaya Zemlia, and that from its summer-quarters it migrates to Japan; also to China, if it can be proved, as appears very likely, that *Anser oatesi* Rickett, from Foochow, is identical with *A. neglectus*.

The following references appear to belong to ANSER NEGLECTUS:—

? *Anser brachyrhynchus* Blyth (nec Baill.) Cat. B. Mus. A. S. B. p. 301. n. 1756 (Panjab) (1849); Irby, Ibis, 1861, p. 247 (Alumbag, Oudh); Jerdon, B. of Ind. iii. p. 780 (1864); Swinh. Ibis, 1875, p. 456 (Japan); Hume, Str. Feath. i. pp. 99, 258 (Etawah) (1873), viii. p. 114. n. 946, (1879); Hume & Marsh. Game B. of Ind. iii. p. 71, pl. ix. (1880); McLeod, Str. Feath. x. p. 168 (Punjab) (1887); Hume, Str. Feath. xi. p. 339 (1888); Seebh. B. Jap. Emp. p. 236 (note) (1890); Blanf. Fauna Brit. Ind. iv. p. 418 (1898); Oates, Man. Game-B. of Ind. ii. p. 65 (1899); Finn, How to know the Ind. Ducks, p. 17 (1901).

? *Anser obscurus* Severtz. (nec Brehm) Turkest. Jevotn. p. 70 (1873); id. Journ. f. Orn. 1875, p. 184; Dress. Ibis, 1876, p. 418; Severtz. Zeitschr. ges. Orn. 1887, p. 22.

? *Anser segetum* (part.?) Trevor-Battye, Ice-bound on Kolguev, p. 423 (1895).

*Anser neglectus* Sushkin, Bull. Br. Orn. Club, v. p. vi (1895); id. Ibis, 1896, p. 135; 1897, pp. 5-8, pl. ii. f. 1 (bill); Sharpe, Hand-list, i. p. 211. n. 3 (1899); Oates, Game-B. of Ind. ii. p. 75 (1899); Madarász, Termés. Füzetek, xxiii. p. 75 (1900) (Hungary); Frohawk, Field, 1902, p. 1405; Dubois, Syn. Av. p. 983. n. 11504 (1903).

? *Anser medius*, Cordeaux, Brit. B., their Nests and Eggs, p. 68, pl. xv. (1896).

? *Anser oatesi* Rickett, Bull. Br. Orn. Club, xi. p. 46 (1901) (Foochow).

*Melanonyx neglectus* Buturl. Psov. i. Ruzh. Okhota, 1901 (Febr.-April); id. sep. impr. p. 27 (1901); Alphéraky, Gusi Rossii, p. 76, pl. vii. (1904); id. The Geese of Eur. and Asia, p. 78, pl. vii., pl. xxiv. (bill) (1905).

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XXXVII.—Notes on the Parrots. (Part II.)

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[Continued from p. 429.]

THE small family *Cyclopsittacidae* has been lately the subject of active researches, and not a few species have been discovered and described since the publication of the *Psittaci* in the 'Catalogue of Birds.'

Dr. Hartert has published the following paper bearing on the subject, "On some Species of the Genera *Cyclopsitta* and *Ptilonopus*" (Nov. Zool. vi. p. 219, pl. iv.), while, later on, the Hon. Walter Rothschild and Dr. Hartert, in their "Notes on Papuan Birds," have given a full list, with notes, of the species of the genus *Cyclopsittacus* (*op. cit.* viii. pp. 72-77).

Only two genera belong to this family.

NEOPSITTACUS Salvad.

NEOPSITTACUS MUSSCHENBROEKI (Rosenb.); Hartert, Nov. Zool. iii. p. 533 (1896) (Mount Victoria); Forbes & Robins. Bull. Liverp. Mus. i. p. 8 (1897).

The presence of this species in South-eastern New Guinea, together with the nearly-allied next species, is very strange, and I should say that the subject requires further investigation.